

雨の日のアイリス

iris on rainy days

イラスト・ヒラサト

『僕の宿題』

これは一人の
少女ロボットが
生まれた
ある雨の日の物語――

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Ame no Hi no Iris: My Homework

This is a story about a female robot born on a rainy day.

This is a story about rainy days.

This is a story about a robot born on a rainy day, endeavouring.

[The First Day of Activation]

Connected.

— ...

Energy is flowing within the body.

— Me.

Activated.

“...do you understand?”

The first sound I hear when I wake up is...

“...hey, do you understand?”

I slowly open my eyes. The first thing I see is a human—or perhaps a robot with human features, no—I can feel her breathing. She is a human all right.

“Can you hear me?”

She is a young female, with long black hair, a white face, and an artificial product on her face—glasses.

“Yes, I can hear you.”

This is the first time I hear my voice, a voice of a young girl. According to the data in my mental circuits, I am set at fifteen years old.

“How do you feel?”

She is staring at me.

“At the moment...main circuits and devices...have no abnormalities found.”

Lying down, I explain my condition in bits. My voice system is not tuned well.

“Okay, great.”

She nods lightly.

“Y-You are...”

My mental circuits are arranging my data.

The girl in front of me is Wendy von Umbrella, female, twenty-three years old, one hundred and sixty-five centimeters tall, confirming with registered user log...

Confirmation complete.

“Master.”

“Hm?”

“You are my master, the first registered user.”

My voice system has returned normal at last.

“Master, you say?”

She, my master, resting her cheeks on her index finger, moves her head towards me.

“Should I call you Wendy? Probably Miss Wendy? Okay. Let me check other combinations.”

I wait for her answer patiently.

“Oh, I know,” she gives an answer after twelve seconds, “Don’t call me master. Call me Professor, okay?”

“Professor?”

“Yes. This is what everyone calls me at the battlefield.”

— Registered user name changed to ‘Professor’.

“I understand, Professor.”

“Okay, good.”

Professor nods in satisfaction and touches my head with her finger. Then she gently moves her finger—this should be called ‘stroking’.

“So, Iris.”

Professor then calls me the first time with my name.

— Iris.

Correct. I am called Iris. My registered name is Iris Rain Umbrella, same as the data in my mental circuits.

“Try standing up.”

“Okay.”

I lift my upper body and stand on the floor from the bed.

Looking down, I see I am wearing a pink western-style dress. A dress is fastened around my waist, on top of it a white apron. A light white ornament is also on my head. This should be called a maid outfit.

“It suits you.”

“Thank you.”

“I’m Wendy von Umbrella. Nice to meet you again.”

Professor holds my hand.

Her hand is at thirty-two point one degrees, a bit cool for a human.

— Checking the surroundings.

I look around, checking my surroundings. The walls and the ceiling of the house is completely white as snow. The hard bed seems to be used for research, and...

— Checking sounds.

I can hear continuing dripping sounds—rain. Raindrops keep slapping on the glass windows, drawing many transparent curves.

Raindrops never stop to fall. Rain never ceases.

I am born on such a rainy day.

[The Third Day of Activation]

“I’m going out, Iris.”

“Take care, Professor.”

Professor waves her hand and heads to the short path outside the house. I bow and see her off.

When I turn back, in front of me were a large front garden and a large brick mansion. This is where I work, the royal Umbrella palace having three hundred years of history.

Walking over the green grass and passing through the front garden, I come to the door. Pushing it open, I see a grand hall covered with rug. With extremely bright branch chandeliers hanging on it, the ceiling

shines on the large painting on the wall.

I walk to the hall with 2.2 meters per hour. Taking a glance at the wooden, bright stairs, I take a right turn at the corridor.

I place my hand on a box beside the wall. After some small clicking sounds, the wall slides and a club-like sweeping machine abruptly appears.

— Initiate Sweeping Process.

As I move around the hall, I swept with the machine. This work is usually done by a clean worm, as they can stick onto the floor and the ceiling and sweep, but they don't seem to fit Professor's tastes, so there isn't any one in the Umbrella residence. "These crawling worms look filthy," she said.

Bright Weather. 19.3 degrees Celsius. Humidity: 45.7%. The inner environment is very suitable for humans.

I continued sweeping silently. But since the uniform air conditioner installed on the walls have absorbed most dust, it isn't really dirty here.

After twelve minutes, forty and one seconds, the sweeping process of the hall is done.

By the same token, I repeat the sweeping process in the corridor, the kitchen, and the research laboratory.

Not long, I open a door to some room. The furniture inside is lacking, deprived of any modern lifestyle. This is the Professor's bedroom.

— Checking fragrance.

My smell device reacts.

— Comparing to data...confirming its composition...circlet cigarette made by the Cloud Company.

There are different types of smell different from the normal constituents of air in Professor's room. They are the smell of the cigarette she smokes. Although it is called a cigarette, it is a replacement for tobacco made to let smokers quit smoking, emanating a thin fragrance of fresh peppermint.

Opening the window for some change of air, I then start to clean this room. This place isn't really dirty as well, so I only spent eight minutes and twenty-six seconds, including tidying the blankets.

— Okay, next place.

I turn around to the next place that needed sweeping.

Something suddenly flashed beside the bed.

— This is...

My iris device contracted, discovering it a photo frame. Two girls are smiling in the wooden frame.

The tall one with long hair and glasses is the Professor.

On her side is a shorter girl wearing a dress with casual, brown, short hair.

— It really looks like me.

The girl in the photo resembles me very much, but I have never taken a photo with Professor, so that isn't I.

Half a year ago, Professor's sister passed away.

It was a car crash. Professor and her sister went out in the holidays for a car ride, and got themselves in a car crash. Professor was the one driving, and after being hit by another car, her sister who was sitting in the seat beside her lost her life.

Professor lost her only relative, falling in despair. So she created a robot with the exact appearance as her sister.

This robot is I.

In recent years, it isn't uncommon to see robots like me, made for people passed away. Same as domestic robots and industrial robots, robots made for people passed away are a kind of commodity that businesses invent in. People who lost their loved ones, people who lost their couples in their old age—there are a spate of consumers who want robots for their deceased relatives.

These robots are proved by clinical psychology and consulting psychology for their *healing* effects. Even the local government subsidizes for these projects.

White skin, brown hair, and sky-blue round eyes. Having a height 2.67 centimeters shorter than an average girl of her age.

This is a robot made with the exact characteristics—height, body shape, hair color—as her sister. Its recognition code is HRM021-a. Its name is Iris Rain Umbrella. This robot is I.

In the photo, the other Iris is smiling. I intently stare at the smile of the girl who looks exactly like me. This Iris is a human who passed away. And looking at her is I, the robot Iris.

— Her sister is smiling.

The Iris in the photo is smiling to me.

I have never smiled once in my life since birth. Although the emotion function is installed in me, there has not been any need for it since Professor never demanded.

Standing beside her sister, Professor is smiling as well. Her face relaxed, she reveals her white, clean teeth. This smile is only shown when humans are elated.

And I have never seen such a smile on her.

[The Seventh Day of Activation]

That night, I was called to her bedroom.

I knock the door, hearing Professor's voice:

"Please come in."

"Sorry for intruding."

Entering the room, I find Professor lying on her bed. Beside her bed, I can see the photo frame I saw yesterday reflected by the interior lights in the room.

"Do you have anything you want, Professor?"

"Yeah..."

Giving an unspecific answer, Professor pouts and say, "Come over here." Listening her order, I come to the bed.

Midnight. This is the first time I am called at this time.

— Sex Service.

This keyword streamed in my mental circuits.

Regardless of industrial or industrial types, there are a lot of robots who provide sex service, occupying a considerable amount in the robot industry. Even behavior prohibited between humans can be done through robots since robots do not get pregnant.

So I have this sex service installed in me. And there is one single significance for such a thing.

“Professor.”

“Yes?”

“Please specify your demand.”

Without waiting for Professor’s answer, I undo the buttons one by one with my hand. I remove my upper shirt and then my skirt.

“Wait,” Professor said, “why are you taking off your clothes?”

My skirt has now reached my knees. I reply, “To provide sex service.”

“Sex?”

“I haven’t garnered data about your preferences on sex service, but I can provide you with satisfactory sex service once I make adjustments.”

“Ah, ah, I see.”

Professor makes a sound of both assent and helplessness.

“What should I do?”

With my skirt half-taken off, I face Professor again.

“Iris, do you think I am a person who enjoys those things?”

“Aren’t you?”

“I am not.”

“Professor, you're single and don't have a boyfriend.”

“It's none of your business.”

“What do you usually do to dispel your sexual desires?”

“I don't need to tell you.”

Then Professor clears her throat and continues, “Anyway, I don't have any interest to my same sex, and I don't want you to provide that kind of service, Iris.”

“So why did you install the sex service in me?”

“This is just a standard setting.”

“Sex service isn't a standard setting.”

“Okay...”

Professor tries hard to move her lips, and then stretches my hand to my side. She pulls my skirt back to my waist.

“Sit down.”

“Yes.”

I sit beside Professor. She takes off her shirt, puts it on my shoulder, and continues, “This is my usual proposition: sex service isn't only for dispelling sexual desires.”

“Isn't only for dispelling sexual desires?”

I can't understand what Professor is saying.

So I ask, “So you mean there's a kind of sex different from getting pregnant and giving birth?”

“Ahah, yeah...” Professor turns her head a little, “How do I put it. Sex is something to confirm the love between two people. It’s an expression of letting our skin touch each other, regardless we’re of the same sex or of the opposite.”

“...”

I listen intently.

“I think, Iris, you will have someone you love one day or the other. It might be a person of the same sex or of the opposite. Or even, it might not even be a human.”

With that said, Professor gently held my shoulders.

“As poetics say, ‘sex is a poetic expression of love’, sex is a nevertheless required event in love. So I installed sex service in you.”

In my mental circuits, the data handling process is running full-speed. My body, perhaps of this cause, starts to become hot.

“So in a not-so-distant future, when you hug with the person you love, I hope, Iris, your heart can beat like a real one.”

“Beat like a real one...”

I just stared at Professor since what she is saying is beyond my comprehension.

“It’s important, so we’ll talk about it later.”

With that said, Professor kisses on my forehead. Her soft lips touch my forehead and part.

— Ah...

“Goodnight, Iris.”

Squinting her amber eyes, she caresses my head.

“Goodnight, Professor.”

I bow deeply, and then left her bedroom.

On my way back to the research laboratory, I touch my forehead. It is where Professor touched with her lips.

— Isn't this kiss a kind of sex service?

This idea came to my mind.

[The Tenth Day of Activation]

The tenth day after my birth.

I have been doing housework for these days. I expand the database for Professor's preferences to increase the varieties of food. For breakfast, she eats bread; for lunch, she goes out to eat; for dinner, she has a set dinner. The brand of circlet cigarettes she uses is 'BOUBLE CLOUD'. She likes light clothes.

I have grasped the structure of the large, royal Umbrella palace. All sorts of data, including the number of bedrooms, the length of the corridor, electric circuits and pipes, paintings, the storeroom for antique, and the safety system were all stored in my brain. There is almost nothing I don't know about this house.

There is still one room I haven't gone to. It is the room of Professor's deceased sister—the room the human Iris Rain Umbrella had used. I believe the Professor meant to let it stay there just the way it is such that the room is the only room locked.

— the only one left is the small storage house.

That day, I concentrated on cleaning the small storage house. I slowly push the door to this brick house.

— Very dim.

The automatic lighting system seems to have broken down, making the small house dim and dull. I searched for the manual switch on the wall near the entrance. But because it was too dim, along with a lot of furniture and commodities stacked together, I couldn't find the switch.

At this moment.

— Ah.

A banging sound came from the back, and the door closed. The house becomes pitch black after the only light rays from outside were gone. I am trapped inside.

— Dark.

This is darkness, a closed space without any illumination.

— Ah, eeya?

I notice a sudden change at this instant.

— I can't move?

My hands can't move.

My legs can't move.

I can't even blink.

— System malfunction?

I check the status of my battery: 97.60%. It fits the standard level, and I should be capable of moving.

— How strange.

My movement circuits lost their abilities. However my mental circuits demand, my hand and legs don't move. Why is this happening?

— Emergency Scan. Error Report. Please start reparation now.

The electric sound warned me. I try to scan, but failed. All my mobile functions are numb, and I can't search for anything that went wrong.

The world then turns darker.

— Ah!

Suddenly, my mental circuits die, and I fall on the floor.

— Ga...ga...gahh!

Stripped from any strength, I lie on the floor. Thud—with such a glamorous sound, I fall on the floor, and at the same time tangled tightly by electric coils. Then a large object—a wardrobe? No, maybe a bookshelf?—falls and presses my upper body. Even I see it coming straight at me, I can't evade but let it injure me flatly.

— Error report. Error report. Error report. Error report!

Icy electric sounds sent out warnings repeatedly, but I can't move, nor can I call for help.

With that, I sink into the abysmal electric swamp and lost my consciousness.

○

...Iris!

Someone.

...Iris!

Someone is calling me.

Like a bubble rising up from a deep sea, my mental circuits has at last returned normal.

“Iris, can you hear me?”

Opening my eyes, I see Professor’s face. Her brows are creased, showing her worry.

“Yes, I can hear you.”

I answered without doubt.

“That’s great.”

Professor throws herself on the chair. Her black hair covers part of her face, some coiling around her glasses. On her face is apparent fatigue.

“You have been sleeping for twelve hours.”

I check the clock in my body: it has been twelve hours and forty-six minutes since my system malfunctioned in the small storage house.

“How do you feel? Does anywhere hurt?”

“No. Nothing abnormal found in my main circuits and devices.”

“Okay...”

Professor gave a sigh of relief.

“I’m really sorry for troubling you.”

“Okay, you don’t have to be so formal.”

Professor shook her head.

“...can I ask a question?”

“What is it?”

“What was the reason?”

I asked the reason why my system died, as I didn't find any abnormalities when I checked the data left in my mental circuits.

“Hm...” Professor looked down, “I'm not really sure as well.”

“Not really sure?”

“When I found you in the small storage house, I immediately scanned your whole body, but there was nothing abnormal in your mental circuits as well as the other circuits.”

Did that really happen?

“Your battery was full, and it's not a forced shutdown due to overheating...”

“So the reason's unknown?”

“I think so.”

Professor keeps her head low. This is a failure even the world-class engineer can't explain, an unknown breakdown.

“Sorry.”

Professor apologizes to me.

“Why are you apologizing?”

I ask.

“Because I am the one held at fault. Did the sudden breakdown freak you out? I'm sorry, Iris.”

— Were you scared?

Professor's words seemed like pebbles thrown into water, evoking ripples in my mental circuits.

— Scared?

Was I really scared back then? Did the sudden darkness scare me that I fell down? Would a robot like me really be afraid of the darkness?

I don't know.

To seek for answer, I look at Professor.

Her eyes, like glass windows wet from the rain, gleamed with damp radiance.

[The Fifteenth Day of Activation]

That day, Professor and I went out shopping.

"Iris, what do you want?"

"No. I don't have anything I want."

"Okay, then let me choose for you."

We walk to the shopping district in front of the station. Professor walks to one of these shops with a banner 'BOUTIQUE BLUESKY'. It is a female clothes shop.

"Iris, your limbs are long and fine. You must look great with dresses."

Having walked into the shop, Professor takes up a dress from the rainbow-like choices of clothes. The dress is white, light laces on the shoulder part.

“Do you like laces?”

When I ask Professor, she widens her eyes in surprise and answer,

“Of course. I like them.”

“Do you like laces, Iris?”

“No. I’m not really fond of them.”

“Do you hate them?”

“No. I don't really hate them either.”

“So it’s decided.”

I take off the pink maid uniform in the dressing room and changed to a white dress. When I brushed off the curtains...

“Great. It really suits you.”

Professor nods in satisfaction.

“Turn a circle around where you are.”

“Turn a circle?”

“Yes, turn around like a ballet dancer.”

I follow her order and turn around. The dress catches some wind lightly and flips itself at my thighs.

“Let’s call it a day.”

With that said, Professor calls to the staff and pays for the dress.

While she is still paying, I look at myself in the mirror. Standing there is a fifteen-year-old young girl wearing a fresh dress. Under the laces are, I can see slightly, snow-white shoulders.

— It really suits me.

I suddenly remember the photo I saw in Professor's bedroom.

The young girl in the photo also wears a white dress.

After it was bought, we return home.

Professor walks slowly on the main street of the shopping district. I follow behind her, keeping one-step distance from her. A large fountain is in the center of the plaza in front of the station, and in its center a large goddess statue. On the bench of the plaza sit a playing kid and his smiling mothers looking after him. There is also an old man feeding the pigeons—It all is a usual, everyday scene.

"This street was once bombed."

The Professor starts talking as she continued walking.

"The town was almost drenched in flames. Only that goddess statue survived, miraculously."

"Is it the Auvare bomb?"

"Yes. From then on, this goddess statue became the city's symbol."

"It's still the most important heritage in this country."

"That's right."

I chat with Professor while we walk. Professor looks much happier than usual.

"Oh."

Professor suddenly stopped.

"What's the matter?"

"Look, that."

She points to an ad billboard in the shopping district, where a movie poster is posted. Red lines saying 'Scary Village ~ Zombies won't be healed even when they die' run across the poster. At its side is a zombie-like man proudly lifting a human head.

"Woah. That's pretty straightforward." Professor shrugs in surprise and adds, "It looks pretty interesting."

"Do you like scary movies?"

I asked.

"Yeah," she answered.

"But to be specific, I like zombie movies."

Professor likes zombie movies— I add another datum.

"The one I like the most is...um...how do I put it? It's the one with zombies dancing along the music."

"Please wait."

I search with the keywords Professor gave. The transmission antenna beside my ear glowed. This is a high-technology device with GPS, online connection, immediate termination, data immediate backup and many other functions. It looks like an headphone. Robots made in detail are mostly differentiated from humans with this antenna device.

My search finished after 0.1 seconds.

"Dancing With the Zombies. Aired nationally six years ago. This movie made the lowest postbox record at that time."

"Ah yeah. When I watched it, there was no other audience around. I was shocked."

Professor likes unpopular movies— data input complete.

“There was a funk dance in the movie, and the zombies danced like this. It was really funny.”

Professor likes funk dance—

“Also, the zombies became extremely big when they combined. This idea’s a bit cliché, but it’s not bad.”

Professor likes combining things into big objects—

Professor continues to talk about zombie movies, seemingly excited. In my database, the tag zombie movies have been repeatedly used.

After talking about zombie movies in front of the huge zombie poster...

“Iris, what movies do you like?”

Professor suddenly asked me.

“Me...?”

I search an answer for the question, but I don’t have any movies I like. So to say, I don’t even know what I like.

“I don’t know.”

“Then what do you want to watch?”

“I don’t know.”

“Hm, it can be something other than movies. Do you have something you want to do, somewhere you want to go to, or clothes you want to wear?”

I analyze every question she asked and search for an answer in my

mental circuits.

“I’ll do anything if it is an order. I’ll go anywhere if it’s an order. I’ll wear piece of clothing if it’s an order.”

“Iris.”

“What?”

“Are you fooling with me?”

“No.”

“Are you being serious?”

“I am.”

“Guuh...”

Professor made a moan I had never heard before.

“So I have homework for you.”

“Homework?”

“Before the end of next weekend, you have to think of what you want do.”

What I want to do— I immediately search, but I couldn’t find an answer.

“ You don’t have to make it hard. Do you want to travel? Do you want to buy some new clothes? Anything is fine.”

“Is this an order?”

“Yes. This is a plea, a plea.”

“So it’s not mandatory but voluntary?”

“Yeah, well, you can say it’s voluntary, but...” Professor smiles, ‘If you don’t do it properly, I’ll cut down your energy supply (no food).”

So it is mandatory.

[Twenty-two Days after Activation]

Then it came to the end of the following weekend.

“So Iris.”

On the sofa, Professor commences, crossing her long legs anew.

“Please tell me your answer to the question.”

“All right.”

Professor said with an acting-like strange way, but she looks at me with a malicious intent like a teenager.

“Let’s start off with the movie you like.”

I nod and say my prepared answer.

“I like zombie movies the most, especially Dancing With the Zombies.”

“Have you watched it?”

“Yes.”

“How’s it?”

“There were many zombies.”

“Is it interesting?”

“No.”

“...”

Professor’s brows trembles..

“Cough. So here’s the next question. What kind of clothes do you want to wear, Iris?”

“I want to wear clothes with laces, especially light maid uniform.”

“Okay, so you like maid uniform.”

“No, I don’t have any special interest.”

Professor’s cheeks twitches.

“...so here’s the next one,” she says, but her interest seems to have declined, “What do you want to do, Iris?”

“Sex Service.”

“Iris.”

“What?”

“All of these are not what you want to do but I want to do, am I correct?”

With that said, Professor throws her hand, “Oh no, drop Sex Service out.”

“Is there any problem with my answers?”

“Big problem.”

Professor squeezes her eyes with her fingers and swipes them upwards.

“This is the first time I’ve heard a robot tell lies at such ease.”

“I didn’t lie.”

I refuted matter-of-factly.

“What you want to do is what I want to do. I didn’t lie.”

“You lied. You lied.”

“I didn’t lie.”

“I just don’t acknowledge it!”

Professor leaned her body on the chair heavily and lifted her head in exaggeration.

“Hm, twenty-three days are too short, indeed.”

“What are you talking about?”

“I’m saying you haven’t noticed your feelings, Iris.”

— Feelings.

I have been thinking about this for this week. My feelings. What I want to do. What I like...

“Is it the Nurtured Self-awareness Acquisition Procedure included in the emotion functions?”

“Yeah, that.”

Human’s feelings are nurtured. The personality molded after a human is born decides his feelings.

Robots are, however, different. Robots are pre-adjusted to suit the needs and likes of their users. This can be said as the robot’s ‘nature’, as opposed to the nurtured personality of humans.

“Okay, Iris, please answer this question.”

“What question?”

“What actually is Nurtured Self-awareness Acquisition Procedure? Try to explain it briefly in twenty words.”

“It is the emotion function in robots to mold, change, or complement their fixed personality to suit their users’ life.”

“How many words were there?”

“Twenty words.”

“Wuu.” Professor oddly shows an expression of losing, “...so, what’s the usual name for the process?”

I acquire the answer with 0.1 seconds.

“The Growing Process.”

“Good.”

Professor claps.

“I gave you the growing process. So, it’s just like what I meant, I hope you can ‘grow’.”

“I...grow?”

“Yes. Look, hear, feel, and get troubled over different things. With that, you can grow. I hope you can grow slowly into an adult.”

“...”

I run my mental circuits full-speed, trying to understand what Professor said.

“What?”

“Yes?”

I couldn’t understand however I try, so I ask for Professor to further explain.

“Professor, why do you hope I can ‘grow’?”

“About this...”

Professor faces me again and softly squints her eyes as if looking at something bright.

“So you can have a good life even if you’re alone.”

○

Our life continues calmly.

In the morning, I cook. After Professor had breakfast, she goes to the research center to work. Before she comes back, I cook, do the laundry, clean, and do all sorts of housework. After that, in the evening, I go out the door to greet Professor.

Every day repeats itself.

I talk nearly everything with Professor. In the dinner we had just then, we talked about the actors in the television soap drama and how she would be spending her holidays— it is, from the perspective of humans, random chat.

Of course, we also talked about ‘my homework’.

What I wanted to do— to find this answer, I ran my mental circuits at full-speed. I asked Professor a lot of questions too, and I got different kinds of answers.

“Iris, you have attained ample ‘feelings’ and have gained your self-awareness. If you are really aware of this, then you can become more honest.”

“Become more honest...”

“Yeah.”

“I don’t quite understand.”

I say this every time I can’t find an answer.

“Professor, you can make decisions. I will follow them.”

“No, I won’t.”

Professor answered with a malicious tone and hit my head.

Then she will say as always, “You have to decide your own feelings.”

With that, I talked a lot with Professor. Days passed. Schedules were filled. The next Sunday, the holidays this month, the holiday next month were scheduled according to Professor’s plans. And I will keep on living peacefully...

That is what I think.

...Until that day.

[Thirty Days After Activation]

“Goodnight, Iris.”

“Goodnight, Professor.”

That day, after parting with Professor at her bedroom, I came to the corridor. All I have left is to go to the research laboratory, enter sleeping mode, and this day will be over.

— Thirty days. Seven hundred and twenty hours. Forty-three thousand and two hundred minutes. Two million and five-hundred-and-ninety-two thousand seconds.

As I walk along the corridor, I look back on everything that has happened.

It has been one month since my birth. I have acclimatized to the lifestyle of this house. Cooking, doing laundry, cleaning—I have become adept at these chores. I can be certain that I am capable of regular housework for robots.

While I savor the bits and pieces of this month...

— Ah.

I found the third room counting from the end glowing.

— It is her sister's room.

How strange. I should have turned off the lights when I shut the door.

— What is wrong?

For one moment, I thought of waking up Professor, but it's already bedtime. If I wake the user up in non-emergency situations, it will just make the user unsatisfied.

— I will first check what happened.

I quicken my pace to the glowing room.

After eleven seconds, I have come to the room. The light indeed is coming from her sister's room.

— It is open...

Rays of light slip from the door gap. I have never, since my birth, seen this room been open.

— What should I do?

There are no reports being sent from this house's security system, but if I don't go in, I cannot be sure whether there are intruders.

I put my hand on the knob and give the door a light push.

I enter the room.

— Search Initiation.

This room's setting and spanning area is quite the same with other rooms, only that this room is decorated mainly by pink. The curtains with reserved flower patterns hint this came from a girl's interest. The bear plushies on the table are placed at the side, and a row of poems and classics are placed on the bookshelf.

— This is her sister's room.

I first check whether the windows are closed. I see they have been locked and have no trace of being opened. Also, I check the room according to the burglar handbook in my mental circuits, and there is nothing abnormal found.

— Professor must have entered this room and forgot to turn off the lights.

A plausible answer is deduced. It seems fine.

— But why now?

I have never seen Professor enter this room. Though for no apparent reason, Professor seems to be always avoiding this room, which I can tell from her usual behavior.

There are several clothes on the bed. Instead of being put, they looked more like being scattered there. The messy scene they portray seems to be someone who had been trying them out before she was going out and had left the ones she didn't wear here.

This probably was what happened ‘that day’.

Half a year ago, ‘that day’ when her sister passed away. In the morning, Professor and her sister went out in their car. Her sister agonized over which clothes she should wear, and got out without tidying them up. And Professor left the room as it was...this is probably what happened.

“Ah...”

There is also a dress among the scattered clothes. It is white, designed adorably, and laced on its shoulder parts.

When I came to, I am pressing my chest. My hands are tightly pressing my chest as if I am bearing pain.

— Eeya?

I can’t understand why I am doing this. Why am I pressing my chest?

For the time being, I can’t let my eyes leave her sister’s dress.

— After five minutes.

The electric sound told me the amount of time passed, and at this moment...

With a ticking sound, the lights were off.

The room is pitch black.

○

Thrown into darkness, I fall down again. I stop working for no apparent reason, like what happened in the small storage house.

— Dark.

After falling down in the dark room, I had a weird dream. I am conscious, but I can see hallucinations— or what humans call daydreams.

— I...

This is *my* memory. This is when I was *I*. This is what I call *my* memories.

I close my eyes in the darkness, cringing, trembling. The darkness, the constricting space, the fetid odor, and the black scene all pressed on my body in this room.

I was trapped in this dark room for a long time. One day, two days, or perhaps longer? Trapped inside, I didn't sleep or pass out, just waited for something.

Then the time came. Light beams shoot into the dark room. In the brightness is a large person, expanding as if it is going to swallow me...

○

“Iris?!”

When Professor opens the door, it is already five minutes and twenty-one seconds after my abnormalities. She noticed the immediate signals I had sent her.

“Wh-What's wrong?!”

Professor runs to my side. I sit on the floor, shivering, like a human numb by coldness, trembling.

It's going to be fine, Iris. Calm down.”

Professor touches my body. She unbuckles the buttons for me and reaches for my chest. She is going to repair me.

I know this, yet...

“Stop!”

I screamed in reflex.

“What?”

Professor looks at me in shock.

— What is that?

Even I am shocked by what I said, but words just come out.

“Stop! Don’t touch me!”

I can’t understand. I...I...I am dizzy, like a human who can’t straighten himself up after seeing something terrible. I back off, my buttocks moving against the floor.

“Iris?”

Professor throws glances of taken aback at me. Still, hysterical words keep coming out of my mouth, “Stop! Please don’t come! I beg you!”

“Calm down. It’s fine! Leave it to me...”

“Don’t come here!”

In the next moment.

A deafening sound is heard.

I suddenly raised my shoulders and hit Professor’s face. She makes a short moan. In the faint brightness, there are flashing pieces spreading apart in front of my eyes. For an instant, I realize that

Professor's glasses are broken, their frame bent and fallen on the floor, and...

Professor also fell down.

— Ah, wuah, wuaghhh!

My arms still swung, I freeze and fall into chaos.

Professor lie flat on the floor, not moving an inch. Red liquid flows incessantly from her face (blood), gradually reaching my feet.

— Wuiaghhh!"

I...just then...

Hit Professor.

Hit her.

Hit her.

Hit her.

Wuaghhh!"

I can't remember anything after that.

[Thirty-one Days after Activation]

I open my eyes.

"Iris?"

It is Professor's voice.

I check the clock in my body: eighteen hours have passed.

"Professor..."

My eyes focused on her face.

Her right eyes were under large wraps, a faint color of red oozing out of the wraps. Her cheeks were purple, seemingly in pain. And she isn't wearing glasses.

"Ah, ah..."

"Great. You have woken up. How do you feel?"

"Professor, leave that for now. Y-You're injured."

"Ahah, this?" Professor touched the wraps on her face unconcerned,

"Don't mind this. The doctor only made it a bit too exaggerated."

"B-But..."

"Let's talk about your first. How do you feel? Is anywhere abnormal in your body?"

Even though I made such an outrageous deed, Professor still worry for me.

I exerted violence on humans. I am a malfunctioning robot, a substandard machine, a piece of trash, yet...

"Professor."

"What's wrong?"

"U-Um..."

I avert my eyes from her and ask a question I asked before.

"What's the reason?"

"Sorry" Professor apologized sincerely, "I don't know the reason this time as well, but..."

"But?"

“Perhaps it's a trauma.”

“A trauma?”

“This is all based on speculation,” Professor blinks more, “This trauma may be some past mental injury or activated instantaneously when it is dark.”

“Hold on a moment. You say past mental injury, but what really is my past?”

“That’s...”

Professor’s face became sullen. She squeezes her lips and look down.

“Sorry, I have no idea.”

Professor said softly.

Questions still puzzle me, but I stop asking. The sorrow in her eyes ceases me from saying anything.

“Oh, by the way.”

Professor found something to say after a while of silence.

“You’re still wearing that. Do you want to change?”

“Okay.”

I stand up.

“Okay, sleep well. I’ll bring you clothes.”

Professor walks out of the room.

My eyes follow her.

— a trauma. A mental scar from the past.

I softly touch my chest.

Then I begin thinking.

Who am I?

○

I had a dream.

If you ask whether robots would also dream, I would tell you there were not such cases before. This might be evoked by the sophisticated mental circuits in me, or perhaps the massive data being disarrayed. Pieces of images were thrown at me like a broken projector.

— Good morning, Iris.

Sleepy, Professor adjusts her glasses.

— I'm off, Iris.

Professor's black hair flutters as she leaves the house.

— Goodnight, Iris.

Professor strokes my head.

These shards of streaming clips are related to Professor. I want to touch them, yet they vanish like a mirage in the desert.

— Professor!

I stretch my hand.

— Professor! Wait for me!

[Thirty-two Days after Activation]

The following day, Professor did not go to work.

After the silent breakfast, Professor says,

“Today’s a paid holiday. I’ve been waiting for this for a long time.”

She twitches her bruised face, forces a smile, and staggers to her room.

I know.

Yesterday night, Professor kept moaning in her dreams. I was the culprit, obviously. She pretended in front of me, but I know she is under great pain.

I look at my right hand.

This metal arm was thrown at her back then. Its power is the same as an adult male hitting her face with a weapon.

That strike might have killed Professor. I...might have killed her.

Even after noon, Professor didn’t come out from her room.

When I ask her what she wants to eat for lunch, she only, behind the door, gave a short reply, “I don’t have an appetite. With that, I just stood there in the corridor.

At six, when I ask her what she wants to eat for dinner, she gave no reply. I want to open the door to check, but I feel I have no rights.

— Professor.

I ball my fists in front of my chest.

She was so nice to me, yet I returned only trouble. She wasn’t angry, and even repaired me, worried for me, and smiled at me. She did all that for me—all that for this substandard product.

Professor's face begin to spin in my mental circuits again. She appears in my mind here and there, like the dream I had yesterday.

At this moment,

"...oh, yes."

I suddenly hear Professor's voice. Surprised, I lift my head.

"oh...no. I'm telling you, that's..."

Professor's voice came through the door. She seems to be talking to someone through the phone.

"No, Iris..."

I have a bad feeling. Professor spoke my name.

— Is she talking about me?

I listen intently, increasing the sensitivity of my hearing device.

Actually, it is forbidden to eavesdrop, but I have lost control over myself.

"So even if it's Iris's..."

The next moment, I freeze completely.

"It's better to dispose of it."

[Thirty-three Days after Activation]

The following day, it is raining cats and dogs.

Under the windy rain, an alien truck parked in front of the Umbrella Palace. Two working robots came out from the weight-loading machine.

— Guests.

The electric notification rang in my mental circuits.

“Iris!”

Professor’s voice came from below the stairs.

“Iris, where are you!”

My legs are trembling.

I am a robot Professor made to service herself. Now she is calling me.

— I must go.

I try walking forward, but my body opposes my wishes.

— Professor is calling me: I must go.

Several times I tried walking forward, but all to vain. For long, I have been standing on the staircase, not moving an inch. While I had been fighting over myself, the robots have already came inside the palace. They were heavy-duty robots with belts on—robots most fit to dispose of faulty robots.

“Iris?”

Professor is at the living room. Seeing me standing on the staircase, she smiles and say, “Oh, you’re here.”

— So I have to be disposed of after all.

“Wu, ahh...”

I back off.

“Iris?”

— What is going on with me?

I press my chest. A force is constraining my chest, greater and

greater.

“No!”

When I came to, I had blurted out.

“I don’t want this!”

I cried, running off like a rabbit on loose.

“Hey, wait, Iris!”

I heard Professor’s surprised voice, yet I keep running along the corridor.

I run, and Professor chases, but I still run. She called for me, yet I couldn’t stop.

— No, no, no!

My legs, in betrayal of my hopes, kept me running. In reflex, I push an ajar door and roll inside.

“Iris!”

Professor chases.

“Hey, please open the door!”

“No, no!”

“What’s wrong?”

“Please don’t come here!”

I exclaimed, my back pressing the back of the door.

My chest grieves, as if it is pulled or squeezed: something is heavily pressing on it. It is the same feeling I had when I saw the white dress in her sister’s room.

Puking all the sultry feelings in my chest, I cry,

“I...”

On the floor upon my eyes,

“...don’t want to be abandoned!”

I laid Professor’s broken glasses.

“I still want to stay here!”

I notice this room I am in right now her sister’s.

“I still want to be with Professor!”

I cry and sob like a child. My visual device is broken, tears overflowing along my cheeks.

I understand.

I am a substandard, broken product that did violence against the mild and gentle Professor, so I had to be thrown away. This is the fate of broken things.

Time has flown silently.

Quiet breathing sounds on the other side of the door huffed. She is waiting for me to open the door.

— No.

I stand up.

I am a robot Professor made to service herself. I can’t make her feel bad.

I move away from the door a step and say, “Professor, sorry. It’s okay now.”

I then open the door, looking at Professor.

“Iris, what’s all so sudden?”

Professor looks at me in worry. Her left cheek is bruised in black and blue, seemingly in pain. Her right eye, with the bandage taken off, is swollen and red.

“Um...”

— No time is left.

“Can you do me a favor?”

— It is the final moment.

“What do you want me to do?”

Professor stares at me.

I open up my heart to her.

“Can you embrace me?”

“Eh...?”

“Professor!”

Not waiting for her reply, I fly into her arms.

“I-Iris?”

I hold her with both of my arms, my face buried in her ample breasts. Oozing a sweet fragrance, a soft and warm object embraces me. Like a child unwilling to leave his parents, I called to her again and again, and touched her with my face. My chest is hot, my internal devices meeting their melting point.

After a while, Professor says to herself, “Iris is such a spoiled child.”

Her arms gently hold my back.

“Yes. I’m a spoiled child.”

I bury my face in front of her chest, replying.

“Okay, let me spoil you more, then.”

“Yes.”

With that, I spent a short yet seemingly everlasting time with Professor.

And so...

“Can we now start?”

An electrical sound came suddenly.

I shoot a look, seeing the two crude robots at the door flashing with glee. I bite my lips, confirming my determination.

“Professor.”

Before parting, I let go of my wrists and look up at Professor.

“Thank you for all the care.”

“...eh?”

I quietly walk away from Professor.

I am Iris Rain Umbrella, all right, the robot of the famous Professor Umbrella. Now I have to walk with my own feet.

“Iris?”

“Goodbye, Professor.”

The two robots in front of me stretch their shoulders. I feel like a

criminal surrendering herself. How silly.

“Can we start our recycling work now?”

The robots made an electrical sound again.

The Professor hesitates, but then says, “...sure, please.”

The robots then...

...did nothing to me.

— What?

The robots reply with an “Understood!” and passed through me and went into the room, taking out items from inside.

— What is going on?

I look at them, fazed. Not long, the clothes scattered on the bed have been tidied. The cardboard boxes have been piled up high at a corner in the room.

Professor directs the robots now and then, like moving furniture.

After thirty minutes.

With all their work done, the robots sit in the truck with all the cardboard boxes loaded and drive off.

“Pro-Professor?”

“What’s wrong?”

“When are you going to dispose of me?”

“What?” Professor blinked, “What do you mean?”

“Professor, you said you’re going to throw me away.”

“I didn’t say that.”

“But you had that phone call in your room yesterday...”

“Phone call?”

I then replay the data in my mental circuits. Professor’s voice echoes:

“So even if it’s Iris’s... It’s better to dispose of it.”

“Hey, you heard all that.”

Professor said, without a change in tone.

“Iris, I meant it’s about time I had to throw away my sister’s remnants.”

“Rem-Remnants?”

“Of course, not all...but there’s a line I have to draw there.”

“ ... ”

“So I called some old friend to arrange some robots to do the job.”

“ ... ”

I am struck speechless.

“What’s all the fuss?”

“No-No...”

I control the skin on my mouth, pretending I wasn’t caught off.

“Nothing.”

[Epilogue]

Some time after that incident.

“Professor.”

I strike off a conversation with Professor after breakfast.

“What’s up?”

Professor turns around to look at me. The bruises on her face have vanished.

“I now know the answer to that question.”

“Okay.”

Professor folds the newspapers she have been reading and faces me anew.

“What do you want to do?” Professor repeats the question like singing, “This is the homework I left you.”

“Yes.”

“Let me hear your answer.”

“All right.”

I stare at Professor. I can only see, reflected in her beautiful jade iris, my sole presence.

“I have been puzzled of what feelings are. Where are they? I couldn’t find them wherever I go.”

“...”

Professor listens intently.

“But I understood now. Feelings cannot be found in a database. It isn’t something one can understood through logical induction. It’s...my own feelings are...”

At this moment, I softly press my chest.

“Right here.”

Right here indeed.

“I can feel it. When I thought I was abandoned, I can feel a strong feeling being pulled in my chest. It was painful yet precious. The burning feel in my chest is my feelings.”

Professor eyes at me. Her pond-like clear jade iris softly reflected my body.

Drip, drip. Raindrops hit the roof.

It has been raining since yesterday. When I came to abruptly, it has halted to a complete stop. Beyond the windows, a rainbow draws an arc along the blue, endless sky. Among the rainbow, Professor looks dazzling, like the goddess statue.

“Um...”

I commenced, nervously. “Yes?” Professor asked.

“is my answer correct?”

Professor quickly apologize, “Oh, sorry.”

“I was too happy. Your answer is correct, of course.”

— My answer is correct!

Her confirmation made my heart pound. This is a kind of feeling too, I guess.

Professor strokes my head, and tells me, “When your chest is pulled, as you say, that’s the feeling of depression.”

“Depression...”

I press my chest. That was depression. The feeling of one’s body

being cut apart and pulled, a little sweeter feeling than pure pain.

“So here’s another question.”

Professor raises her finger.

“Iris, can you express your feelings right now verbally?”

“My feelings now?”

“Yes. What you feel at this very moment. Okay, let’s say, how do you feel after you have solved your homework?”

I press my chest and press harder to confirm my feelings. Professor is in front of me. Professor Umbrella, the beautiful Professor, the Professor who created me. This Professor is now looking at me, caressing me, praising me.

And so I give a name to the warm sensation overflowing in me.

“I am extremely...happy!”